

2011 Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

The Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC) works closely with our elected and appointed officials to ensure parks and open space are a priority at City Hall. Electing a “Park Friendly” Mayor who values neighborhood parks, open spaces and recreation facilities for all San Franciscans and understands the challenges facing our park system is essential for our city. With the help of our dedicated community volunteers San Francisco’s parks are the cornerstone of every neighborhood but it is with the support of our new Mayor that our parks can continue to thrive.

Please complete each question to the best of your ability in order for NPC to assess your “Park Friendly” rating. Everyone loves parks, Our coalition strives to understand your specific ideas about supporting parks, in addition to your overall level of appreciation for them. All responses will be posted on our website for the public to view. Thank You.

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Please return electronically to Victoria Bell, Deputy Director a vbelle@sfnpc.org by Wednesday, September 7, 2011 by 5pm.

1. Tell us about your personal parks use or experience. In what ways do you feel San Francisco’s parks contribute to your quality of life?

I believe that one of the most important functions of government is to provide general support to public institutions like parks and recreation. Parks are public goods like our libraries; they are spaces that everyone can access, and serve to create a sense of community, belonging, safety, and neighborhood pride. They provide activities for families, children, and seniors alike. I often go with my family to McLaren Park, which is on the border of my district and a five-minute walk from my home; where we love watching the dogs play. This is the type of neighborhood community that makes our City such a great place to live.

2. From your observations, what are the 3 most important issues facing recreation and parks in San Francisco? Specifically how will you begin to address these issues if you are elected?

Funding, development, and pollution are three of the most important issues challenging the health and safety of San Francisco's public parks.

This week, I collaborated with the Wild Equity Institute, the Sierra Club, the Audobon Society, and the National Parks Conservation Association to introduce legislation to close the Sharp Park Golf Course, to protect endangered species, improve public recreation, and reduce the City's liability at Sharp Park. The Avalos Sharp Park legislation will help develop new hiking and biking trails, while redirecting resources spent at the San Mateo County golf course back into San Francisco's parks, rec centers, and golf courses. Overall it helps provide access and diverse recreation opportunities, saves Rec & Park resources, and helps ensure that future generations can see the recovery of endangered species.

I am a proud life-long environmentalist and an avid bicyclist; I have brought my environmentalism with me to the Board of Supervisors, the Local Agency Formation Committee, and most recently to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. In City Hall, I championed legislation to save landmark trees, expand open space, and restore natural areas.

On the Board of Supervisors, I have helped lead the charge to protect our parks and public spaces from over-commercialization, and as Budget Chair for two years, one of my top priorities was to protect the Recreation and Parks Department from draconian General Fund cuts while making targeted appropriations for increased open space and recreational opportunities. We prevented immediate layoffs of the City's Rec directors, funded workreation jobs for young people, added community gardens, new recreation facilities, and playgrounds.

I have consistently opposed any new development that would jeopardize public parks. One of my most recent legislative efforts was to use revenue from my Real-Estate Transfer Tax to attempt to repeal the visitor fee for Golden Gate Park's Botanical Garden.

3. What is your view of the role of volunteer community park groups? What commitment do you make to working with these groups to improve our public open spaces?

I support volunteer community park groups; they play a dramatic role in the support, maintenance and upkeep of our parks, as well as serve as some of parks' greatest advocates. Through volunteer groups, we've been able to win challenge grants, build greens paces, playgrounds, and park amenities, and as Mayor, I will work to support neighborhood park volunteer groups, as well as give them a lot of input in shaping their own parks.

- 4. There is a substantial budget gap for the City's ongoing parks and recreation programs, estimated at over \$30 million a year. What will your administration do to reduce or eliminate this serious annual shortfall? And how will you mitigate the impact on the General Fund?**

As Mayor, I will pursue innovative solutions to our cashflow problems, and have already begun the charge with my Real Estate transfer tax on high-end commercial buildings, which has already brought in \$45 million in new revenue this year, and without which we could not have balanced the budget. I plan on championing many more creative solutions to generate revenue, and if elected, I would throw the full weight of the Mayor's office behind ensuring our parks remain free and open to the public.

- 5. RPD requires nearly \$2 billion in capital funding to repair and renovate our parks. Will you commit to supporting the upcoming GO park bond?**

Yes.

- 6. How will you work to ensure both capital and operating funding becomes more sustainable for RPD while ensuring parks are accessible, safe and enjoyable for all?**

As I mentioned above, I have continuously fought against funding cuts and entrance fees to our parks. Securing general funds dollars is essential for the continued funding of these public spaces. The Parks budget acts as a slush fund for the Mayor's Office and the parks are always the first place that the city taps for funds to fill other priorities in bad budget years. As Mayor, I want to create a new funding stream for our parks, through a combination of parcel taxes or by increasing the fees for out-of-town users.

- 7. Deferred maintenance of things like irrigation systems continue to plague the park system. With little funding available to fix these types of problems, what would you propose to improve park maintenance?**

I want to enhance the relationship between the Rec & Park Department and the Public Utilities Commission to support improving the irrigation and draining infrastructure for our parks. There are models of Public Utility Rec & Park entities that are worth considering, with the possible goal of merging Rec & Park with the Public Utilities Commission.

- 8. NPC's Green Envy study, a landmark white paper first published in 2003 and updated in 2007, advocates for equitable open space for all residents in all neighborhoods of San Francisco. What, specifically, would your administration do in the next four years to ensure that every neighborhood can have green space for play, exercise, and respite from urban life?**

As Mayor, I will continue to do what I have done as Supervisor in my district, namely working closely with residents to improve green and park spaces in our community. I want to expand our green acreage citywide, and break up those wide expanses of concrete with green parks and open spaces.

- 9. The Blue Greenway project promises to transform our eastern shoreline and serve a number of communities desperately in need of open space and access to the water. But the southeastern waterfront has many pollution issues, developing it is expensive, and there is a significant funding gap in the Blue Greenway plans.**

What will you do, in the next four years, to advance the Blue Greenway and bring it closer to reality?

I would be very much interested in developing our waterfront for greater maritime and recreation uses, and am willing to look at revenue bonds and general obligation bonds to help build the Blue Greenway and port infrastructure. I look at this area as an essential part of the greening of San Francisco and the effort to convert blighted land into greater public uses, as well as an excellent source of jobs.

- 10. Numerous neighborhoods in the City are exploring ways to better support their local parks, including voluntarily taxing themselves for new and increased services (Park Improvement Districts, etc.). It is nearly impossible to develop these districts without clearly understanding what the Recreation and Parks Department currently spends on each facility. The Department does not maintain this type of budgeting, and it is therefore difficult to understand what the needs of each park are.**

What will you do in your administration to support improved clarity of the Recreation and Parks Department's fiscal management given its extremely diverse facilities?

I believe that Rec & Park's budget needs to be more open in discerning budget allocations per parks; there should be public oversight for every park committee, and citizen advisories for rec centers and parks to assess budgeting issues. As far as Park Improvement Districts, I am in favor of them, but we would need to ensure equity in each district so that the richest neighborhoods don't get the best parks simply because the surrounding population can afford it.

- 11. Community outreach and a transparent public process is a critical component to our civic work in San Francisco, such as when we look at leasing facilities, adding amenities and even creating a new public park. How will you support the public dialogue about parks across every City agency that manages land?**

If elected, I aim to collaborate with community leaders and have a planning department that is responsive to responsible community concerns rather than just to politically connected developers and development lawyers.